

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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## THE LANGUAGES OF RESTORATION

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**W**itness marks. Down to sterile. Shear load. Parts per million. Primary source. Historic fabric.

These are some of the terms used in historic restoration. An entire dictionary of such terms could be created, and we would still miss a number of them. Historic restoration represents “multiple languages” because it involves different types of workers and specialists.

For example, **witness marks** is a term used by conservators, carpenters, paint analysts, masons and others to identify marks left on wood or other materials that shows where something used to be, but has been removed. Witness marks could refer to paint lines, screw or nail holes, and indentations left by the removed material.

**Down to sterile:** This is an archaeological term that indicates that the dig has gone down to the point where there are no artifacts,

or any indication of human habitation.

**Shear or lateral load:** This is an engineer’s term that considers the imparted horizontal force, primarily due to wind and seismic loading, upon a structure.

**Parts per Million:** This term is used to define the concentration of hazardous material (e.g. lead) in mediums such as floor/wall tiles, or painted surfaces.

**Primary source:** This term is used by historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists. It refers to a document, transcription or other written source left by a person who lived during the period being studied. In the case of the Cosmopolitan Hotel restoration that period would be the late 19th century when the hotel operated.

**Historic fabric:** This term is used by historians to identify materials, such as wood, paint, wallpaper, adobe, or furnishings, that date back to the period of the building’s existence – in this case roughly the late 19th century.

Architects, archaeologists, carpenters, electricians, engineers, equipment operators,

landscapers, historic photographers, plumbers, plasterers, roofers, wood workers, and other trades and professions involved in historic restoration have their own unique sets of terms or languages.

Working out ways to effectively communicate is important for all involved. Sometimes it is done by meetings, reports, drawings, photos, or e-mails. Sometimes it may be just pointing. Sometimes a translator is needed. “The profile of a pit is the side of a hole.” “Shear load is a sideways push.” Sometimes it is learning some of the other vernaculars.

A reconstruction site can sound like a symphony orchestra warming up.

Violins screech, drums beat, horns and woodwinds play apparently oblivious to each other. Saws scream, shovels scrape, hammers pound, boards creak, people yell over the noise.

Both seemingly chaotic collaborations then somehow progress to a magnificent unified purpose.

